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Vancouver City Archives : A New Resource

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NEWS AND NOTES

VANCOUVER CITY ARCHIVES: A NEW RESOURCE

The City of Vancouver Archives until about three years ago consisted of miscellaneous material collected by Major J.S. Matthews, self-appointed, and later officially appointed, City Archivist from 1929 to 1970. After Major Matthews death in 1970, a new City Archives building was built, a professional staff was recruited, and an active acquisitions and inventory program was begun. Already some two hundred seventy-five private collections (additional manuscripts) have been organized and are available for research. As well, a *Preliminary Inventory*, Volume 1, has been published and a second volume is off to the printers. As a result of the active acquisitions program, and the coincidence of the renovations program at City Hall with the opening of the new City Archives building, over one hundred *tons* of city records have been transferred to the archives in the past sixteen months. Though it will take considerable time and effort to organize all this material, the City Archives in Vancouver is now able to offer the professional urban researcher one of the most complete collections of urban material available anywhere in Canada. For not only does the total collection offer the privately donated materials of individuals, institutions, businesses, unions, clubs, associations, and societies, and the public records of civic departments and boards (in most cases from their origins) but it also includes historical photographs; maps, plans and charts; books, periodicals and pamphlets; and, paintings, drawings, and prints. As well, considerable quantities of microfilm, microfiche, and audio records have been donated, transferred, or loaned to the Archives.

Any outline--even a brief one such as this--of the public records holdings of the City Archives indicates both the diversity and extent of the material available. For example, amongst the records of Council there is a complete run of Minutes from the first meeting of Council on May 10th, 1886 to the present, a complete series of By-Laws from By-Law Number One to the present, and a complete series of Minutes of Council Committees. These records are essential to almost any research project as they provide an introduction to the persons involved on either side of an issue that came before Council.

From the Records of Council, it is possible to go to several series which begin to fill in the detail behind the often cryptic description found in Minutes and records of that sort. For early transportation matters, public services, and utilities, reference can be made to the Board of Works and Engineer's reports, correspondence, and minutes. For matters of general concern to the citizens, matters of petitions, and matters that brought delegations before Council, reference to the Mayor's Office Correspondence and the City Clerk's Correspondence is vital. Before 1901, all matters were filed in the Clerk's Correspondence; after that period the Mayor's Office hired a separate secretarial service thus creating two series where one had been previously.

These records, along with the Records of Election and the Voter's Lists have all been organized to date. Other records such as the financial, welfare, police, personnel, planning, fire, legal, and medical health office records along with the Board of Administration records--though not organized--round out the official civic record. To these, also, have been added the semi-public records of the Parks Board, the School Board, the Pacific National Exhibition (PNE) and the Greater Vancouver Regional District. As well, the records of the Corporation of South Vancouver and the Corporation of Point Grey, the two municipalities which were amalgamated with Vancouver in 1929, have survived and are available for research.

In spite of the relative completeness of most records series, one or two precautionary notices are necessary to the out-of-town

researcher which will avoid wasted travel time and money, and needless embarrassment to the City Archives Staff.

First, some record groups are still 'restricted' because of the nature of material or the 'nervousness' of the Department Head. In particular, the records of the Welfare, Police, Engineering and Law Departments fall into this category. Some Parks Board and some School Board records fall into the 'restricted' category also. Generally, prior arrangements (which can usually be made by letter or telephone) would save considerable time and inconvenience. Another type of restriction that often applies to correspondence and some similar materials is the twenty-year access rule. This currently limits access to material after 1954, to access through the Department Head. Often a telephone call from the archives, or a brief note, dispenses with this obstacle.

Second, the City Archives hours for research are limited to 9:00 to 4:30, Monday to Friday, and other times by appointment. This limit on access is made necessary because of a relatively small staff of eight. 'Other times by appointment', however, tends to be relatively liberally interpreted since most evenings and often on weekends a staff member will be in and therefore the researcher may be given access as well. It is a necessary precaution, nevertheless, especially to those researchers accustomed to twenty-four, seven day a week access at the Public Archives of Canada.

With these two precautions, the City Archives of Vancouver welcomes researchers, provides xerox and other forms of copying on a cost-recovery basis, and will answer any reasonable written, telephone, or personal request. With the resources available, Vancouver and Lower Mainland history can now be studied in detail, from its origins to the present. Growth patterns, 'city-beautiful' movements, anti-oriental activity, planning philosophies, demographic studies, and theories of municipal government to name a few, can now be studied as never before. Comparisons between or amongst various cities such as Toronto, Vancouver, Montreal and Quebec City are now possible, because of growth of archival

collections, not only in Vancouver, but elsewhere in Canada. Significant, serious urban studies can and should be undertaken. And, if Vancouver City Archives is a sample, the prognosis for urban historiography in the next few years is very good indeed.

R. Lynn Ogden

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Marvin McNinnis, *Kingston in the Canadian Economy of the Late Nineteenth Century*, Institute for Economic Research, Queen's University, Kingston, Ontario, Discussion Paper 132.

This recent study of Kingston will be of interest to urban historians in Canada. "The main intent of the paper is to survey census data on occupations and on output and employment in industry with an eye to what conclusions they may suggest about the relatively retarded development of Kingston in the latter half of the nineteenth century. Attention is directed mostly to the period 1850-1881, for which the census data are most abundant.

"The leading concern in the history of Kingston in the later nineteenth century has to be its slow development relative to other urban centers in Canada. While Kingston was the largest and most important urban center of Upper Canada in the early years of the nineteenth century, it was surpassed in size and economic importance by Toronto in the 1830's and by Hamilton at mid-century.¹ In 1851, Kingston still played a prominent role in the economy of Upper Canada and was vying with Hamilton for the position of second-city. The succeeding half-century witnessed industrialization and rapid growth elsewhere while Kingston fell back into a position of lesser significance."

Professor McNinnis, in explaining the retarded growth of Kingston, concludes that, in all, the Ontario city "...was one of the weakest locations one could find for manufacturing industry in all of central Canada. This showed up with special severity at the end of the century.